

A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

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Drawing New Maps of Hope: A Reflection for Catholic Education in Ontario

Pope Leo XIV, who is himself a teacher, has been reflecting on what Catholic Education needs in this present time. In his apostolic letter for Catholic education, Pope Leo XIV asked us this –

Know how to ask yourselves: Where are you going and why?¹

This is the quest of every educator. To what are we aiming? What are the expectations, the goals? To what horizon do we look? Pope Leo asks us to look up and contemplate the sky with its many many stars and constellations. He encourages us that the gifts we have in Catholic Education in Ontario are lights, joined by others, associations, institutes, boards, in our own towns and districts and across the province and around the world. The horizon is full of stars by which we can chart a new path.

And why is a new map required? Pope Leo describes the many challenges faced today by students around the globe – war and famine and political instability in some places, disconnection, loneliness in other places, technology which can, at times, dehumanize and yet still can connect. Rather than be overwhelmed by the challenges, he encourages us to see the lights that have always guided us and new lights that can draw us to “pedagogical innovation and prophetic witness”.²

In this work, he asks us to be servants, seekers, choreographers and artists. He proposes a path forward

that begins in humility and listening. This is the stance we take to truly get to know those with whom we are travelling. And then it takes courage to seek answers inspired by treasures of past teachers and the wisdom of those alongside us. It does not tend towards dry and static responses but towards the artistic endeavor, the creative, the beautiful.

We are the people being asked to draw new maps – maps that lead to hope. And Pope Leo XIV has begun to sketch that map for us. He urges us:

Fewer labels, more stories; fewer sterile contrasts, more harmony in the Spirit. Then our constellation will not only shine, but it will also guide us: towards the truth that sets us free (cf. Jn 8:32), towards the fraternity that consolidates justice (cf. Mt 23:8), towards the hope that does not disappoint (cf. Rom 5:5).³

We have invited three educators to reflect along with Pope Leo’s document. Regardless of your job title, role, or system responsibilities, take this time to reflect with us:

Where are *you* going and why? Where are *we* going and why?

Dr. Anne Jamieson
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“Justice, Justice Shall You Pursue” (Deut 16:20): Why Social Justice is Essential to Catholic Education

In his best-seller, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey argued that we must “begin with the end in mind”: in order to achieve a goal, we first need to have a mental image of the desired outcome. In *Drawing New Maps of Hope*, Pope Leo sketches out how one of the outcomes of an authentically Catholic education should be graduates deeply grounded in Catholic social teaching, committed to contributing to a world of greater justice, peace, inclusion, and flourishing. Social justice, he emphasizes, is not “tangential” to Catholic education; on the contrary, the principles of Catholic social teaching—such as solidarity, care for Creation, and the dignity of every human person—must provide the values and guiding vision for *why* we do what we do, and *how* we do it. Of course, that is no surprise to any Catholic educator in Ontario: each of the Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations is informed by the Church’s vision of the world we are called to build together.

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Central to Pope Leo’s analysis is this issue of *integral anthropology*—of the kind of humanity our educational system is trying to help form. “Forgetting our common humanity has given rise to divisions and violence; and when the earth suffers, the poor suffer the most.”⁴ Catholic education, he continues, must help to form consciences capable of choosing not merely what is convenient, but what is just, lifting up social justice and environmental justice, promote moderation and sustainable lifestyle. Pope Leo asks us to recall that we are all siblings in a single human family, and he calls us to speak and act in ways that promote true peace reflecting our fundamental connectedness to one another.⁵

To the degree that we do that, he says, “Catholic education becomes leaven in the human community: it generates reciprocity, overcomes reductionism, and opens up to social responsibility. The task today is to dare to pursue an integral humanism that addresses the questions of our time”.⁶

Among those questions is the rapid advancement of technology (especially artificial intelligence). Here, the Holy Father reminds us of the moral priority of the *person over technology*. Technological advances, as exciting as they are, “must be oriented towards the protection of dignity, justice and work”.⁷ Faced with the Industrial Revolution, the last Pope Leo (Leo XIII) made a similar appeal in the nineteenth century, and now the current Pope Leo is applying a similar analysis to the needs of our twenty-first century.

Because it is grounded in our Christian understanding of humanity, social justice can never be an “optional add-on” in Catholic education. “Justice, justice shall you pursue,” the Bible tells us—and Pope Leo reminds us that justice in society begins with what we teach and model in our Catholic schools.

**How does my teaching incorporate Catholic social teaching across different subject areas?
How does it permeate class discussions and decision making at every level?**

Dr. Murray Watson is a Catholic Biblical scholar and interfaith activist who serves as the Adult Faith Formation Animator for the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board. He writes and teaches widely on Biblical, theological, and interreligious topics, and their relevance to Catholic education.



Keeping the Human Person at the Centre of Catholic Education

When reading Pope Leo's apostolic letter *Drawing New Maps of Hope*, what stands out is not a list of recommendations, but a carefully sustained orientation. The letter invites readers to slow down, to attend more closely, and to reconsider what Catholic education is fundamentally about. At its core is a conviction that is both simple and demanding: education begins by placing the human person at the centre.

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This emphasis is firmly rooted in the vision of the document from the Second Vatican Council on education - *Gravissimum Educationis*. In it, education was understood as the formation of the whole person, intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social, always in relation to the common good. Pope Leo XIV, writing 60 years later, begins with the same assertions. Rather than approaching education primarily as a system to be managed or a problem to be solved, the letter returns attention to concrete persons and relationships, reminding educators that formation cannot be separated from lived experience.

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Leo has emphasized listening not as a methodological tool or strategy, but as a fundamental posture. Formation begins not with ready-made answers, but with encounter, dialogue, and attentiveness to the realities people bring with them. He offers us an invitation to accompany with greater care and humility. The letter resonates strongly with Pope Francis' pastoral emphasis on putting people before ideas, grounding ministry in mercy, and attending to reality rather than abstraction. An educational approach shaped by listening resists reducing learners to outcomes, metrics, or problems in need of resolution.

The Canadian Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan offers a helpful framework for understanding why interior attentiveness matters in education. He argued that objectivity does not come from denying subjectivity, but from engaging it responsibly.⁸ Through what he termed self-appropriation, learners become aware of how they experience, understand, judge, and decide. This process fosters intellectual honesty and moral responsibility, allowing persons to move beyond unexamined assumptions toward thoughtful and accountable judgment. Education that neglects this interior dimension may produce competence, yet it often struggles to cultivate wisdom and discernment. We are reminded that education is not only about what is taught, but about who the learner is becoming.

In Canada, Catholic education unfolds within a pluralistic and multicultural society, where questions of identity, belonging, reconciliation, and inclusion shape daily school life. Keeping the human person at the centre offers a way forward that is neither defensive nor superficial. *Drawing New Maps of Hope* offers more than encouragement. It offers orientation by centering education on the human person and grounding formation in listening and being attentive to the lives entrusted to Catholic education today.

How does my own professional practice seek to centre the human person?

Dr. Heejung Cho serves as a chaplaincy leader with the Waterloo Catholic District School Board and teaches theology at Assumption University and St. Peter's Seminary in London, Ontario. She is interested in the areas of dialogue, listening, and accompaniment within Catholic education.



In the Midst of Incessant Noise, Teach Them to Find Silence

Drawing New Maps of Hope is a beautiful call to those of us in education, to help students and ourselves to find silence. The apostolic letter insists that education must carve out “spaces for silence, discernment, and dialogue with their conscience and with God.”⁹ It reads like a gentle hand placed on the teacher’s shoulder, reminding them that learning is impossible when the mind is drowning in noise. Children need a way back to themselves. Teachers do, too.

Before the lesson, the explanation, before we ask anything of them, we ask nothing. We let them sit in quiet, eyes open or closed, hands still, breath returning to a normal human rhythm. It is prayer, it is meditation, it is stillness. It is the both, the return, and the shift. It is the moment when the room exhales and remembers that human beings, not machines, are gathered here.

Those few minutes can do something that technology never will: they restore the child’s interior world. They settle the nervous system. They open the mind. They remind the teacher that they are not directing traffic; they are guiding souls. And in a world that mistakes noise for progress and distraction for engagement, that small ritual becomes an act of quiet rebellion against the culture of noise.

The letter speaks about hope as something we can map with our choices. Offering silence at the start of a lesson is one of those choices. It tells students that their inner life matters. It tells them that reflection is not a side dish; it is part of the meal. It teaches them, slowly and gently, how to step back from the brink and reclaim who they truly are, in a culture trying its best to shape their identity for them.

We can resist the noise, we can! We can build spaces that protect silence and allow for reflection. The power is in *our* hands. Pope Leo reminds us, “Young people ask for depth; they need spaces for silence, discernment, and dialogue with their conscience and with God.”¹⁰ It is in prayer that many find solace and meaning when the world feels unpredictable and worrying. Prayer can anchor a restless heart. It reminds us that we are not alone and not required to carry the full weight of existence by ourselves. In returning to prayer, we return to humility, to trust, to love.

This, too, is a form of resistance. In a culture that prizes immediacy, productivity, and constant self-assertion, prayer slows us down and reorders our priorities. Whether whispered in a classroom or practiced quietly at home prayer can restore perspective. It reconnects us to God and to one another!

If we are serious about mapping hope, for our children and for ourselves, then a return to prayer is not nostalgic or naïve. Silence that stands in the face of a noisy world and opens to prayer is much needed stop on the map towards hope!

What are some of the factors contributing to the noise of our current culture? How can our classrooms become spaces that lift up silence in the midst of all that?

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